

Alabama Clean Water State Revolving Fund

Additional Subsidization and Affordability Criteria

Effective September 30, 2015

Purpose:

This document establishes the additional subsidization and affordability criteria for the Alabama Clean Water State Revolving Fund. The criteria are effective September 30, 2015, and may be modified from time-to-time upon notice.

Background:

Section 603(i) of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act states the following:

Additional Subsidization-

(1) IN GENERAL- In any case in which a State provides assistance to a municipality or intermunicipal, interstate, or State agency under subsection (d), the State may provide additional subsidization, including forgiveness of principal and negative interest loans--

(A) to benefit a municipality that--

*(i) meets the affordability criteria of the State established under paragraph (2);
or*

(ii) does not meet the affordability criteria of the State if the recipient--

(I) seeks additional subsidization to benefit individual ratepayers in the residential user rate class;

(II) demonstrates to the State that such ratepayers will experience a significant hardship from the increase in rates necessary to finance the project or activity for which assistance is sought; and

(III) ensures, as part of an assistance agreement between the State and the recipient, that the additional subsidization provided under this paragraph is directed through a user charge rate system (or other appropriate method) to such ratepayers; or

(B) to implement a process, material, technique, or technology--

(i) to address water-efficiency goals;

(ii) to address energy-efficiency goals;

(iii) to mitigate stormwater runoff; or

(iv) to encourage sustainable project planning, design, and construction.

(2) AFFORDABILITY CRITERIA-

(A) ESTABLISHMENT-

(i) IN GENERAL- Not later than September 30, 2015, and after providing notice and an opportunity for public comment, a State shall establish affordability criteria to assist in identifying municipalities that would experience a significant hardship raising the revenue necessary to finance a project or activity eligible for assistance under subsection (c)(1) if additional subsidization is not provided.

(ii) CONTENTS- The criteria under clause (i) shall be based on income and unemployment data, population trends, and other data determined relevant by the State, including whether the project or activity is to be carried out in an economically distressed area, as described in section 301 of the Public Works and Economic Development Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3161).

(B) EXISTING CRITERIA- *If a State has previously established, after providing notice and an opportunity for public comment, affordability criteria that meet the requirements of subparagraph (A)--*

(i) the State may use the criteria for the purposes of this subsection; and

(ii) those criteria shall be treated as affordability criteria established under this paragraph.

(C) INFORMATION TO ASSIST STATES- *The Administrator may publish information to assist States in establishing affordability criteria under subparagraph (A).*

(3) LIMITATIONS-

(A) IN GENERAL- *A State may provide additional subsidization in a fiscal year under this subsection only if the total amount appropriated for making capitalization grants to all States under this title for the fiscal year exceeds \$1,000,000,000.*

(B) ADDITIONAL LIMITATION-

(i) GENERAL RULE- Subject to clause (ii), a State may use not more than 30 percent of the total amount received by the State in capitalization grants under this title for a fiscal year for providing additional subsidization under this subsection.

(ii) EXCEPTION- If, in a fiscal year, the amount appropriated for making capitalization grants to all States under this title exceeds \$1,000,000,000 by a percentage that is less than 30 percent, clause (i) shall be applied by substituting that percentage for 30 percent.

(C) APPLICABILITY- *The authority of a State to provide additional subsidization under this subsection shall apply to amounts received by the State in capitalization grants under this title for fiscal years beginning after September 30, 2014.*

(D) CONSIDERATION- If the State provides additional subsidization to a municipality or intermunicipal, interstate, or State agency under this subsection that meets the criteria under paragraph (1)(A), the State shall take the criteria set forth in section 602(b)(5) into consideration.

Discussion:

On June 10, 2014, the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 was signed into law. Among the provisions of the Act is the new Section 603(i), which details how a state Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) program may provide additional subsidization. It also requires that each program establish an affordability requirement that can be a consideration in granting additional subsidization.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 was the first time that Congress applied the principle of additional subsidization to the CWSRF. In response, the Alabama CWSRF program utilized additional subsidization in the form of principal forgiveness as way to construct green infrastructure.

In Alabama, green infrastructure (stormwater) projects are constructed very infrequently, even though stormwater runoff is a major source of pollutants. Many local communities lack a dedicated revenue stream to pay for stormwater projects; thus, the CWSRF program has applied principal forgiveness to these projects in order for them to be economically viable. It is hoped that in time, the success of these projects will encourage the construction of more improvements without the need for additional subsidy. The Alabama CWSRF intends to continue this practice to ensure nonpoint source projects are constructed along with the traditional point source projects.

In previous years, the amount of additional subsidization was set by Congress through the annual appropriations process. The amount available varied from year to year and may have been subject to a minimum or maximum. Under the new 603(i)(3), a state may provide up to a maximum of 30% of its capitalization grant, if the total appropriations equal or exceed \$1.3 billion. If appropriations total less than \$1.3B, the additional subsidy maximum ranges from 0% at \$1 billion up to 30% at \$1.3 billion. The Alabama program elects to provide a maximum of \$1 million per year in principal forgiveness, subject to the 603(i)(3) maximum.

Individual assistance agreements will be subject to a project maximum of 50% principal forgiveness. The project priority list will be used to determine which projects are provided principal forgiveness, starting with the highest-ranked green infrastructure (stormwater) project, and working down the list until the available subsidy is depleted.

603(i)(2) also requires state CWSRF programs to establish affordability criteria. The criteria “*shall be based on income and unemployment data, population trends, and other data determined relevant by the State*”. Traditionally, affordability has been determined by the CWSRF through a comparison of median household income and annual sewer use charges. The new requirements take a broader approach, focusing more on income and employment of the affected population. In response, the Alabama CWSRF program will utilize the county poverty rate (a measure that compares household income to the number of persons in the household), county unemployment rate, and statewide population trend to determine if a project is affordable. Although this measure will not be used for additional subsidy, it will be tracked and it is hoped that as green infrastructure projects build momentum it may be possible to transition to applying subsidy to projects that meet the new affordability criteria.

Final Criteria for Additional Subsidy and Affordability:

Additional subsidy in the form of principal forgiveness shall be made available in a total amount per year not to exceed \$1 million, or the cap set at 603(i)(3), whichever is less. To be eligible for additional subsidy, the primary purpose of the project must be to construct green infrastructure intended to mitigate or prevent stormwater pollution. Each project may receive a maximum of 50% of the allowable cost in principal forgiveness. Funding will be provided in rank order on the project priority list, until the maximum amount has been allocated.

The Affordability Measure for Alabama will be calculated as the sum of the following:

1. Poverty Rate Value: The poverty rate of the county served by the project minus the statewide poverty rate;
2. Unemployment Rate Value: The unemployment rate of the county minus the statewide unemployment rate; and
3. Population Trend Value: If the statewide population has increased over the two most recent 10-year census estimates, the Population Trend Value shall be 1; if it has decreased the Population Trend Value shall be 2.

Projects with an Affordability Measure of more than 10.0 are considered to meet the Affordability Measure according to the criteria.